

Don't Fear Challenge, Bishop Bernardin Says

Bridgeport, Conn.—(NC)—Catholics must have "a correct understanding of truth" and openness if they are to face the changes demanded by the times as challenges rather than threats, Bishop Joseph L. Bernardin, general secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, asserted here.

They also must have "a great faith in the Holy Spirit," he added, "if the present crisis is to be a threshold to a new and better era instead of a retreat into oblivion."

Speaking at a convocation at the University of Bridgeport, the bishop declared that a great danger now is "the possibility that the (Second Vatican) Council may lose its momentum; that the wonderful — but often relatively minor — changes which have already taken place will be understood as representing everything the council stood for."

"If this attitude were to prevail," he continued, "the full meaning of the renewal would be missed and, in the process, the crisis of the irrelevancy of religion to everyday life would become more acute."

Asserting that "fear of the unknown" is one of the problems people face today, Bishop Bernardin pointed out that "while we may be sure of our ultimate goal, we cannot always be sure of our immediate path. We cannot always know the direction in which change will take us. Moreover, we cannot always control the change once it begins to take place; its frequently brings in its wake excesses of various kinds, exaggerations and even errors."

"This," he pointed out, "frightens many people because it threatens them, and it is this fear which prompts some to refrain from moving ahead as quickly as many would like. While the common good often requires a certain degree of moderation, when the slow-down is arbitrary or stems from fear, it can cause a great deal of tension and conflict."

It was here that Bishop Bernardin said "we must have a correct understanding of truth and how our knowledge of truth progresses."

"While we can never change the objective content of revealed truth, we must continue to harmonize that truth with the new knowledge we acquire about man and the world. We must try to find better ways of expressing it — ways which will be meaningful to the men of every age."

Calling "openness" a second quality people must possess, the bishop asserted that "there must be a real willingness on our part to listen to another person's point of view."

"We must try to find out what he really means when he says or does certain things. Just because a person uses a terminology which is different from ours, this does not mean that his position is totally different. Still less does it mean that his position is incorrect," the bishop said.

"Too often a person will

turn off someone else and consider him as a threat to orthodoxy simply because the one does not understand what the other is saying. To avoid this, we must be open; we must be willing to communicate. And this will require a great deal of patience and humility."

The bishop said "the important thing—and in a sense this is the real genius of (Second Vatican)—was that no doors have been closed to further development."

He also pointed out that Pope Paul VI himself had

stated that the "documents themselves represent a true development of doctrine because they are a synthesis; they bring together into union, after analyzing their respective content, complementary truths—truths which at first have appeared opposed or contrary."

One of the most significant changes brought about by the council, the bishop asserted, "is in our understanding of the Church herself."

"Vatican II has reaffirmed the hierarchical structure of the Church as outlined 100

years ago in the First Vatican Council," he noted. "If anything, the reaffirmations of Vatican II have further clarified and strengthened the central unique position of the Holy Father and the bishops who are united with him. This structure, we believe, was willed by Christ Himself."

"At the same time, however, Vatican II in its Constitution on the Church attempts to give another vision of the Church — one which is, at once, more biblical, historical, vital and dynamic than many of the images of the past. In this new vision, the emphasis is on the people.

"While the institutional aspects of the Church cannot be ignored, the Church is basically a people to whom God communicates Himself in love. The Church is envisaged as continuing the work of Christ, the Good Shepherd—a work of redemption and reconciliation. As the Good Shepherd came to serve and not to be served, so the mission of the Church is one of service to God's people and all the authority given to her by Christ should be understood within the context of service."

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James Tobin Dies, Literary Expert

Tuckahoe, N.Y.—(NC)—Dr. James E. Tobin, 83, professor of English and dean of the school of general studies at Queens College in New York City, died of a heart attack here Oct. 30.

Dr. Tobin, longtime faculty member at Queens and an expert in 18th Century literature, was noted for his work in Catholic literary circles. He served on the editorial board of the Catholic Book Club, was chairman of the Catholic Poetry Society of America and served for 22 years as associate editor of Thought and served as acting editor of the Fordham quarterly from 1945 to 1948.

ELECT SUPERIOR GENERAL

Rome—(NC)—The general chapter of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost has elected Father Joseph Lecuyer superior general of the congregation, which has some 5,000 members.

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